

The view that never thinks

Olafur Eliasson

Galleri Kirke Sonnerup/Stalke Galleri
Kirke Sonnerup

12.10.02 to 30.11.02

This exhibition marks Olafur Eliasson's third solo presentation with Stalke Galleri. His first solo exhibition with the gallery took place in 1994, followed by a second solo presentation in 1997. The View That Never Thinks (2002) continues this longstanding collaboration and highlights the early development of Eliasson's photographic practice.

From October 12 to November 30, Galleri Kirke Sonnerup presented an extensive exhibition by the internationally renowned Danish/Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson. This exhibition marked Eliasson's third solo exhibition with Stalke Galleri since 1994.

The exhibition featured exclusively photographic works created between 1993 and 2002.

The title of the exhibition, The View That Never Thinks, reflected Olafur Eliasson's approach to landscapes in Icelandic nature. For the audience, the exhibited works were largely experienced as "open" works, in which the viewer's own perception became central.

As Eliasson himself expressed:

"I was particularly interested in what constitutes a space. Do we create it through our presence and the way we see? How were we integrated into it? My works only existed when there was a viewer, and for me, my work was about giving the individual the opportunity to evaluate their own placement and role in relation to others, to objects, and to nature. What opportunities did we have to see ourselves from the outside? To navigate something as abstract as society, you needed tools, and here art could play a role."

(Politiken, February 17, 2002)

Olafur Eliasson began studying at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen in 1988 and moved to Cologne in 1993, where he held his first solo exhibition at Galerie Lukas & Hoffmann. At the time of the exhibition, he lived in Berlin and was affiliated with the gallery Neugerriemschneider.

In 1995, curator Francesco Bonami invited Eliasson, among others, to participate in the exhibition Campo in Venice. This exhibition, consisting exclusively of photographic works, marked the beginning of a new generation of prominent international artists.

The following year, Olafur Eliasson was scheduled to represent Denmark at the Venice Biennale. In addition, he was to hold a solo exhibition at Tate Modern in London, as well as exhibitions at the Osaka Museum in Japan and Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid, beginning November 2, 2002.

Over the preceding years, Olafur Eliasson had participated in significant exhibitions at the Guggenheim Museum (New York), the Museum of Modern Art (New York), the Art Institute of Chicago, and Kunsthalle Bielefeld.

Many major museums worldwide had acquired Eliasson's works for their collections. In Denmark, his work had been prominently featured at Esbjerg Kunstmuseum and Vestsjællands Amts Kunstmuseum, both of which had recently acquired works by the artist.

Galleri Kirke Sonnerup, which was part of Stalke Galleri in Copenhagen, opened in April 2002. Olafur Eliasson's exhibition was the second in this series. Eliasson grew up in the Holbæk area, and it was partly due to this local connection that it was a particular pleasure to present him at the new gallery.

Three years earlier, the municipality of Holbæk had acquired a large outdoor pavilion for the town's beach park, which had since become one of the town's prominent landmarks.



Invitation cover for Olafur Eliasson's exhibition 'The view that never thinks' at Stalke Galleri, 2002



Henrik Wivel describes Olafur Eliasson's retrospective photographic exhibition as a powerful presentation of the artist in the role of a contemporary neo-romantic image-maker. The exhibition presents Eliasson's photographs of Icelandic landscapes and natural phenomena and places them within an art-historical tradition in which nature is not merely a motif, but also a bearer of knowledge, experience, and sensory perception.

According to Wivel, Eliasson has, since the mid-1990s, worked in parallel with installations and photography. While his international breakthrough is primarily associated with his spatial installations, photography constitutes an independent and central medium in his practice. The photographs do not function as documentation, but as artistic investigations of light, space, perception, and the structures of nature.

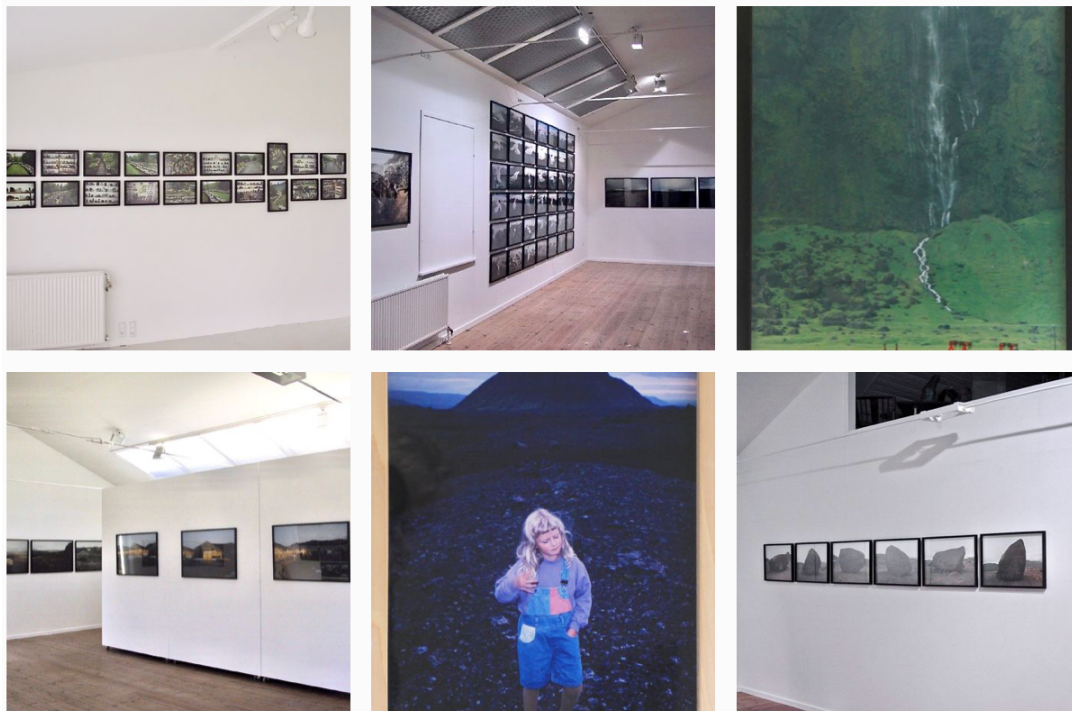
Wivel emphasizes that Eliasson's photographs often revolve around elemental natural phenomena: glaciers, lava, stone, water, moss, earth, and light. These motifs are treated without sentimentality or idealization. Nature is not presented as harmonious or sublime in a traditional romantic sense, but rather as something both concrete and alien, something that resists full control and comprehension. At the same time, the images possess a poetic sensitivity that relates to Romanticism's fascination with the sublime and the incomprehensible.

The article points out that Eliasson's approach differs from both classical landscape painting and documentary nature photography. His works are neither straightforward records nor symbolic allegories. Instead, he creates images that insist on the viewer's own presence and sensory engagement. The photographs become sites where the viewer is confronted with their own perception and with the scale and materiality of nature.

Wivel connects Eliasson's work to Romantic thought, while stressing that it represents a contemporary and critical form of neo-romanticism. Where classical Romanticism sought the metaphysical or religious in nature, Eliasson instead investigates the conditions under which we experience nature—through the senses, technology, and cultural frameworks. Light plays a decisive role here, not only as a physical phenomenon, but also as a means of cognition.

The article also highlights Eliasson's Icelandic background as significant. The harsh geological landscapes of Iceland—shaped by volcanoes, glaciers, and extreme weather conditions—provide a distinctive foundation for his artistic investigations. The photographs depict nature as being in constant motion and transformation, marked by both creation and destruction.

Overall, Wivel regards the exhibition as a convincing demonstration of Olafur Eliasson's artistic consistency and depth. The photographs confirm him as an artist who successfully combines scientific sobriety with poetic sensibility and art-historical awareness. The exhibition shows how Eliasson uses nature as a space for reflection on humanity's position in the world—and on the very act of seeing, sensing, and understanding.



Installation views and selected photographs from Olafur Eliasson's exhibition *The view that never thinks* at Stalke Galleri, Kirke Sonnerup, 2002. The works include Icelandic landscape series and presentation layouts from the exhibition rooms